Creepy Core Memory of a "traintrack-encounter" from my Childhood

By fukounashoujo

For some context, I put together this small map using satellite images from 2006 (anything older was completely unusable). It probably makes sense to look at it while reading this...

It was the late 90s, I was just under 10 years old, and the internet was still a total novelty to us kids. We watched Episode I in theaters, carried Tamagotchis everywhere, and made mixtapes. My best friend Melanie and I were already those "weird girls" who were into "boy stuff" like video games, secretly watching horror movies, and listening to Metal. Even for the 90s, it probably wasn't that unusual, but we definitely had a reputation. It didn't make us total outcasts, but it definitely encouraged us to get into trouble.

Back then, I lived in Duisburg – an absolute shithole of a city in Western Germany. There were mainly two places our parents let us go unsupervised: First, the local public pool (which back then wasn't full of violent assholes). They had amazing "Piccolo" soft-serve ice cream with strawberry and chocolate dip, and a nice, big lawn. And then, of course, there was the lake. It was surrounded by patches of woods and had an old factory ruin nearby. Those were the places where our childhood adventures happened.

One time, we climbed up a steep embankment and discovered the factory from above. We didn't dare get closer because we saw punks there drinking beer and smoking. They were

probably just random teenagers, but to us, they were "thugs." We ended up exploring the factory on a different day (another incredibly stupid and dangerous move since that place is super instable and collapsing).

I actually went back there in 2007 to take some photos, which I recently posted in a German subreddit: https://www.reddit.com/r/LostPlacesDeutschland/comments/1svokdf/alte_steinfabrik_nahe_eines_baggersees_in/

For that post, I made another map, though it shows more modern aerial shots:

On some days, we'd hang out at the lake, the playground, or the woods and then walk over to the pool. To get there, we often walked along the train tracks. Honestly, looking back, I have no idea how dangerous that actually was. Trains did run there (mostly industrial transport, I think), but it was very rare, and you could hear them coming from a mile away... still, probably wasn't the brightest idea.

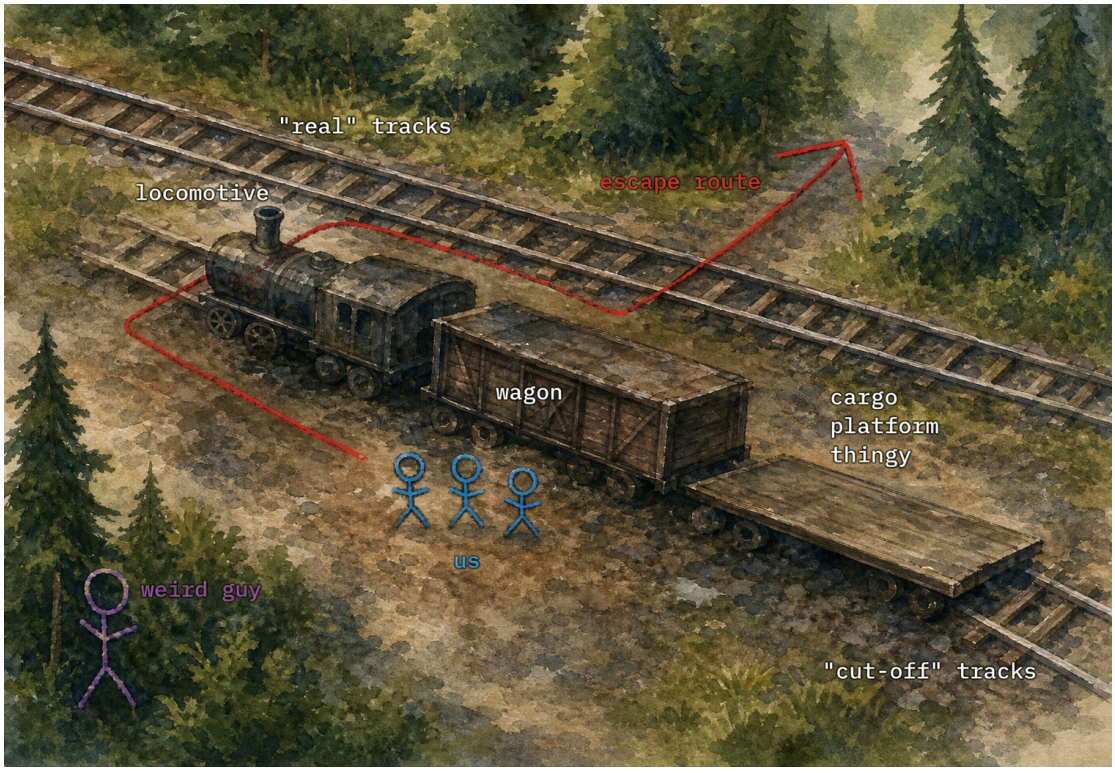
There is one specific memory, though, that still haunts me to this day.

Directly south of the pool, there was a piece of old track next to the main line, like cut-off tracks placed next to the real tracks. Sitting on those tracks was an old locomotive wit wagons. I'm not sure if it was meant to be decoration (it was in a random patch of woods with no real path leading to it) or if it was just being stored there. Anyway, it sat there for a while before being moved to the side of a road about 1 or 2 kilometers away. Unfortunately, I haven't found any pictures of it.

Every now and then, we'd go to that train, climb on it, or try to get into the wagon that was attached. But as kids, we never managed to get the sealed door open.
One time, I was there with two others (a good friend - not Melanie - and a guy I knew from primary school), right after coming from the lake where I showed them the factory... when one of them suddenly got spooked. A man was standing a few meters away behind the trees, just watching us. I don't know if he was trying to hide, because it must have been obvious that we could see him. He just stared. We didn't run. We just stood there like idiots, not knowing what to do.

I can't describe exactly what he looked like anymore. I remember that he seemed "old" to us and had a beard, so he was probably at least 30, though from today's perspective, I'd guess he was much older. I don't know for sure. Yet, he definitely wasn't a homeless person since he looked way too well-groomed for that. That's one point I'm certain of.

He started mumbling something. It seemed like he was talking to us, but he was so quiet we couldn't hear him. We were pretty scared, but for some reason, we still didn't run.
The train was between us and our "escape route," which would have been just a few meters back to the road. I made a sketch in paint and ran it through an AI, and the result captures the situation pretty well:



The creepy guy then started coming closer, and we realized he was saying "Hello" over and over, but still very quietly. Luckily, one of us said something like, "We need to get out of here," and we started walking slowly along the side of the train.

Suddenly, the guy got louder. He kept saying: "You were at the factory." "What were you doing at the factory?" and "What did you find at the factory?" Then, out of nowhere, he *screamed*: "WHAT DID YOU FIND/SEE IN THE FACTORY?!" and started not running, yet walking toward us pretty fast.

That's when I saw he was carrying a stick that looked like a broken-off handle of a broom. We ran away screaming for help and didn't look back. Once we hit the normal road near the public pool again, we made sure there were people around so we'd feel safe. Then, for some weird reason, we just started laughing like crazy.

It only hit me later that he must have been secretly watching us at the factory and probably followed us the whole way. According to Google Earth, that's a distance of about 1.75km (over a mile). We wanted to know if there really was something at that factory, or if the guy just wanted to scare us. I still don't know.

As kids, we never dared to go back to the factory. Not after months, not after years. Those childhood friendships eventually drifted apart. We never spoke about the incident again, and after primary school, I lost touch with them.

The whole memory feels so strange and dreamlike now. It's like parts of it are missing. Over the years, I've often wondered what might have been in that factory. I've done research time and again, half-expecting to find a report about a body being found there (what tbh. wouldn't be too surprising seen from today's perspective on the town) or something similar. But there's never been a single article where that old factory mentions anything like that. This drove me crazy for years and I finally managed to contact one of my friends from back then to find out if I'm missing something. She only stated that she doesn't want to talk about it and even... blocked me? Not sure if the blocking has anything to do with that day... still, a bummer, since it took a while to get any response...

As a teenager, I started getting into "Lost Places" and taking photos. I'm not much of a people person and only have two close friends who I don't see that often. Even today, I still go into the woods alone, visit abandoned spots, or do some stealth camping. I did go back to the old factory a few times, but that was many years after the incident. When I went back, I couldn't find anything interesting. Today, there's nothing left there but broken glass and stuff left behind by junkies.

PS:
This may be a random brainfart but while writing this I think I realized that this story may be the reason Stand By Me is so nostalgic to me...